



United States  
Department of  
Agriculture



## We are the Brewers. We are conservationists.

*By Colette Kessler, USDA-NRCS*

In the wide open spaces in the rolling plains of western South Dakota, Fanny Brewer and her husband found opportunity.

For 19 years they've been ranching cattle in Ziebach County and recently discovered there's a better way to operate.

Brewer is one of 1,500 farmers and ranchers, who have already enrolled in the Conservation Stewardship Program, which is administered by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Brewer's husband is the one who first read about it in a newspaper.

"He went and asked at our local conservation district office in Ziebach County, they're the ones who filled us in and kept us informed," Brewer said.

The Brewers admit farming and ranching isn't for everyone, emphasizing it's a tough business to be in at times, especially financially.

Participants in the CSP earn payments for conservation performance; the higher the performance, the higher the payment.

Little did the Brewers know at the time when they enrolled in the CSP program back in 2010, it would turn into one of the smartest financial decisions they've ever made for their operation.

**"It gives you a little bit more financial freedom to do things you dream of, 'I wish we could do this, but money wise, you just can't.' It's given us a little bit more of that financial freedom."**

**- Fanny Brewer, CSP landowner**

The financial freedom comes through the CSP program by making changes to their operation. Since they don't have a lot of cropland, the Brewers enrolled in enhancements geared mostly toward their

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**Fanny Brewer, cattle rancher in South Dakota, and Conservation Stewardship Program participant.**

cattle herd and according to Brewers, it's paying off.

"We pay a little bit more attention to how we feed our cattle, one of the programs analyzes how you're cattle use the feed they are on and protein in the feed," Brewer said. "Now we know how to rotate them in different pastures that helps you utilize our natural forage here, it's all been beneficial, I can't say anything has been bad, I just can't."

Brewer says the CSP program has not only been a financially good decision, but it's also made them better cattle producers.

The CSP is a great program for multiple reasons, according to Jessica Michalski, CSP Coordinator.

"CSP's conservation enhancements are making great advancements in improving air and water quality, providing wildlife habitat and increasing soil and plant health," Michalski said.

Michalski says the CSP program offers a lot of enhancement programs for farmers and ranchers to take advantage of to improve their operations and the environment.

"What may work well for one producer, may not for another, but it really depends on the size of their operation and the finding the kind of programs that will work well for them," Michalski said.

"It's a win, win, right across the board, you have to do other practices that take time, but for the benefits you get back, it's well worth it," Brewer said.

If you'd like more information on how to apply and the programs that are available, just visit your local USDA Service Center or visit its web site at [www.nrcs.usda.gov/getstarted](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/getstarted).

**"It benefits your whole operation, your land, your species of animals on your land, your cattle and if you're into farming your crops, it's all designed to benefit you as a producer, I would recommend it to anybody."**

**- Fanny Brewer, CSP landowner**

From 2010-2013, the Natural Resources Conservation Service has assisted South Dakota farmers and ranchers, like Brewer, in enrolling almost four million acres of working crop, pasture, and range land into CSP.

CSP is available to all producers, regardless of operation size or type of crops produced, in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and the Caribbean and Pacific Island areas.

Those who have already signed-up, may be able to renew a contract if they have successfully fulfilled the initial contract and agree to achieve additional conservation objectives.

**Want to learn more about the Conservation Stewardship Program?**

[nrcs.usda.gov/farmbill](http://nrcs.usda.gov/farmbill)

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